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# THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF SACRED LITERATURE

## THE DUTY OF THE CHURCH IN RELATION TO THE STRUGGLING CLASSES. II A READING COURSE FOR MINISTERS

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### Part II. Specific Classes of Dependent Persons

#### The Abnormals

##### REQUIRED READING

C. R. Henderson, *Dependent, Defective and Delinquent Classes*, Part III.

##### COLLATERAL READING

A. G. Warner, *American Charities*, chaps. xi, xii, xiii (always wise).  
A. F. Tredgold, *Mental Deficiency*.  
W. Healy, *The Individual Delinquent* (1915).  
S. G. Smith, *Social Pathology*, pp. 198 ff.  
W. H. Allen, *Efficient Democracy*, chap. x (in spite of some faults, a book which will stimulate thought and lead to results).  
Insanity: Mercier, *Insanity*.  
Feeble-Mindedness: List of books in *Bulletin of N.Y. School of Philanthropy*, Vol. VI, No. 1, September, 1912.  
Epilepsy: W. P. Letchworth, *Care and Treatment of Epileptics* (1899).  
W. P. Spratling, *Epilepsy* (1904).  
Inspection visits: A. Johnson, *The Almshouse*.  
Statistics: *Benevolent Institutions*, Special Report, Bureau of the Census (ask your Congressman to send you a copy for the church library).

For current articles see the *Survey*, 105 East 22d Street, New York City. Subscribe for this indispensable journal or get your local library to take it (\$3.00 a year). If your town has no library, per-

suade your fellow-citizens to establish one. See also the *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction*.

#### 1. Analysis of the Situation

In a very true and real sense, every human being needs the help of his fellow-men. The most helpless of all are those persons who have inherited wealth, who have no stimulus of necessity to work, and who have never learned to do anything worth a price, who cannot even protect their property from robbers without the Irish policeman's aid, and whose display of money and jewels is a constant temptation to pick-pockets and burglars. How could any one of us get through life without the help of hod-carriers, carpenters, plumbers, ploughmen, trainmen, dentists, doctors, lawyers, and some of the politicians? Our babies depend on us, and some day they may have to feed us. "No man liveth to himself alone."

But "the poor" are dependent in a different and particular sense: they cannot exist by means provided within the domestic group and they must appeal to strangers and the public. It is of the "indigent" we are to speak

here. They also are our neighbors and have all the human needs. Often they are exemplary in conduct and character, rich in good works, marvels of self-sacrifice, ready to share their hard crusts with companions in distress.

What is the cause of misery? The answer is that given by the demon: "Legion," for the causes are many. In the oriental countries where there is no science, where their theology teaches transmigration of souls, the explanation is that the unfortunate lunatic, leper, or epileptic probably is being sorely punished for some sin which he committed in some former state of existence and which he has forgotten. In some other theological circles known to us, all misery is explained by the sin of Adam. But since we are taught not to defame a dead man who cannot reply to such serious charges, we do not avail ourselves of that simple explanation.

Frequently we hear it urged that drunkenness or some other vice is the direct cause of extreme poverty and of the humiliating necessity of living by mendicancy. The suffering itself is a proof to such minds of the exceeding sinfulness of the man without a home or a loaf. But we remember Job, and Him who had not where to lay his head, and forbear from criticism of that kind. Too many good people fail in business and come to want to accept this argument.

One answer is nearer the fact: the cause of a man's being indigent is that he does not have enough income. "The curse of the poor is their poverty." So far as inadequate wages, child labor, lack of social insurance, enfeebling conditions of dwellings and work-places

are causes of poverty, we must deal with general and broad social remedies. We may do that later. Here we have to do with direct relief of persons already overthrown by economic disaster. We are not hunting for the man to blame. If he is in heaven or hell our recriminations will not reach him, and in the meantime our charity patient is starving. Let us leave judgment to the Great Judge, and seek sensible ways of help. It is rarely possible for us to say that a certain indigent person is "unworthy"; and even if we could prove it, the need would be more sad than if he were only poor and not also wicked. Of all those whose misery appeals to our compassion, the "unworthy poor" present the most urgent claim, for he is poor indeed who lacks both bread and virtue.

It is impossible to discuss all kinds of misery under one head; therefore, in order to make clear the nature of the social problem of charity, we must image to ourselves various groups, each having peculiar forms of infirmity and distress.

We may at this time briefly describe the "abnormals"—the insane, the feeble-minded, the epileptic. In some respects these are the most hopeless and pathetic wards of the community, and the chief burden of the states. They all have some deep defect of the brain and central nervous system.

1. Insanity is a mental and moral state caused by some form of diseased nervous tissues in the brain and the nervous system connected with the brain. These diseased conditions are sometimes inherited, sometimes the result of accident, shock, starvation, sickness, trouble. It is highly desirable that the symptoms indicating the approach of insanity

should be widely known, since cure and recovery are rendered more uncertain and difficult by delay, as in the case of cancer. Every human being should be examined at least twice a year by a skilful physician and dentist to detect the incipient signs of trouble and plan a mode of life to avert the evil. Young persons who are neurotic, feeble, irritable, moody, "queer," may be saved from becoming a burden to society if they are carefully observed and examined at intervals by specialists, and if prompt preventive means are employed under expert advice. The number of insane is very great and the cost of supporting them is enormous. The public schools should employ psychologists and physicians for such inspections. It is neglect of this policy which has loaded the states and the nation with a multitude of persons whose existence is a curse to themselves, a sorrow to their families, and a danger to society.

The menace to society is all the more appalling because insanity is inherited and falls like fate on the offspring. The insane man cannot earn his way, for he is disabled at the center of his being, the brain. In this modern competitive world only the steady and balanced mind can find the way. When the mainspring of a watch is broken it is mere lumber, even if the case is made of gold and ornamented with jewels. In the mind of the insane, the mainspring is broken. This is part of the mystery of mind and body, that disturbed and diseased nervous tissues make the noblest soul a wreck.

Once the insane were treated as prophets or as criminals, because a superstitious age found in their strange

language and actions proof of divine communications, or of divine wrath, or of demonic possession. The modern mind trained by science sees disease and we call for prevention, or cure, or humane asylum.

2. The feeble-minded child may not be diseased, but his brain is arrested in its growth and is only partly developed. If the nervous tissues are not normally developed the mind cannot unfold its latent powers, and education helps only a little way. The idiot, the imbecile, and the moron—various types and stages of feeble-mindedness—are out of place in the competitive industry where the machinery is driven by steam at a rate with which only good brains can keep pace. These unhappy creatures, most of whom have inherited inferior brains from inferior parents, are incapable of co-operation with the average workman, and they are turned adrift. They are almost certainly mendicants unless their families are able to support them, and this is rare.

3. The epileptics have quite other characteristics, but their seizures unfit them at intervals for co-operation in industry and trade. They cannot be trusted with continuous tasks. They cannot work regularly with machinery. They may be intelligent and upright, but when the convulsions come on they are disabled. Systematic industry cannot count on them. It is one of the darkest tragedies of our earthly existence.

## **2. Measures of Relief and of Prevention**

The disability of the abnormals is of such a nature that they must be placed in institutions under the custody and care of the state. There are good

reasons for this policy. They must be removed from society and placed under some degree of restraint, and this power to deprive one of liberty should not be trusted to private institutions, unless the state has competent agents or inspectors in such institutions to protect the rights of the patients and of the public.

Rarely is it necessary to lock up the insane patients in cells or to bind their limbs. In well-managed hospitals and asylums, under expert medical direction, with trained nurses in attendance, and with plenty of outdoor occupations and recreation, life goes on much as elsewhere and few of the patients feel a sense of restraint. Indeed they have more liberty in a good colony for the insane than they could have at home, especially in a city. This is true also of the epileptics and the feeble-minded.

This humane and scientific asylum treatment of the insane and feeble-minded is desirable for another reason: it prevents the propagation of the infirmity and thus diminishes the number of sufferers and the cost of support to society.

### **3. What Can the Church Do to Help in the Care of the Abnormals?**

The church, through its federated organizations, should study the religious needs of the county and state institutions established and maintained for this class of the miserable. The commission of the churches may secure expert counsel by consulting the state board of charities and correction, and by working out a plan of co-operation. Local physicians will give lectures on the pathological aspects of the problem. Such a commission should appoint a local committee in each county for the visitation of jails, county poorhouses,

and state institutions near them, with special reference to the moral and spiritual needs of the patients and wards. Life in such institutions is lonely and sad. Music and sympathetic visits of trained persons, under the advice of the state board, will give comfort and hope to the forlorn people. It is what Jesus required of his disciples. He cast out demons; so can we; or at least we can help the despairing to a little light and cheer. They are human like ourselves. We do not like to be forgotten and left for dead. A cheerful musical service, with readings of suitable literature, in the county almshouse, is a beautiful form of social service for the church societies of young people.

Individually these visitors might discover and report cases of negligence, of defective sanitation and housekeeping. But to do this wisely and effectively the committee must either go to school to experts or employ an expert to open their eyes, to set up standards of criticism, to indicate to them what to look for, to give examples of possible abuses and the most tactful way of securing reforms and improvements. University courses and classes in schools of philanthropy are open for those who wish to fit themselves for such public service.

Rarely will a committee be helpful which starts out to find fault with officials and raise a sensation in the newspapers of the party in power. Sanity is required. Sympathetic approach will accomplish wonders where meddlesome censoriousness sets loose a nest of hornets. The state board should be consulted about the appointment of visitors, and the officers of institutions must be respected.

The state federation of churches can improve conditions by insisting on the merit system of appointments in state and county institutions. These positions, which carry with them a salary, should be open by competitive examinations to the world. The candidates should pass an examination or offer diplomas of accredited professional schools, and should prove that they have had experience which assures their fitness for the place. They should be promoted on the basis of efficiency demonstrated by tests and records. They should not be dismissed for political reasons, but only for unfitness for the work assigned, after a fair trial and for causes given.

After reading all you can, make up a party and visit the county poorhouse. Ask a physician or health officer to go with the party. Ask the secretary of the state board of charities to give instructions and advice for visiting committees. Talk it over in your churches. Help the state authorities to create a public opinion demanding scientific and humane treatment of the "least of these little ones."

Advocate early and late the establishment of laboratories of psychology and pathology to examine all inmates of jails, prisons, and other institutions, and all charged with crime, to discern instances of insanity, feeble-mindedness, and epilepsy, and have those who are afflicted put in the care of the proper institution.

#### **Topics for Discussion**

1. What are the characteristics and needs of the insane, the feeble-minded and epileptics? Talk these over until the essential aspects of the problem are clear to all.
2. What institutions in your state have been established for the medical, educational, and custodial care of these "abnormals"? Are these institutions adequate or do they require improvement and enlargement?
3. Are there typical cases of abnormals in your county or town? Discuss the consequences of neglecting them.
4. Discuss specific plans of the churches for comforting, cheering, and helping these sad children of misery.
5. Discuss (with suitable care) the biological laws of inheritance and our Christian duty in relation to these laws.
6. Discuss the sin of community neglect and blindness to such distress.